



## City of Bristol

### **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **STATEMENT ON \$300 MILLION PHARMACEUTICAL SETTLEMENT TO THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT**

BRISTOL – Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu and Health District Director Marco Palmeri issued a statement today concerning the \$300 million proposed settlement for the State of Connecticut, of which 15% or \$45 million, will be distributed to the cities and towns.

“This is a landmark moment for the opioid crisis and the public health epidemic that we have been fighting for the last few years,” said Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu. “We know that Bristol families have been struggling and we have worked to eliminate the stigma and create pathways for recovery. These include the City Council establishing the City of Bristol as a ‘Recovery Friendly Community’. This designation, as defined by the Connecticut Alcohol and Drug Policy Council, identifies communities that have programs to support residents who are in recovery from substance abuse disorders.”

The good news for Bristol is that we have several substantive accomplishments already under our belt, and will be in a very good position to receive additional funds from the state’s Opioid Recovery & Remediation Fund Advisory Council,” the mayor continued.

“The City of Bristol, like many other communities throughout the country, is plagued by the Opioid crisis. Despite the tremendous progress the Mayor’s Opioid Task Force has made to bring awareness to this disease, encourage recovery and to eliminate barriers to recovery services, the frequency of overdoses has not decreased. So it is especially encouraging to hear that CT will be receiving substantial funds from the opioid distributor’s settlement. These funds are needed to get to the root causes of this disease, teach prevention strategies and provide supportive services to get folks back to being productive members of our communities,” said Marco Palmeri, Director of Health Bristol-Burlington Health District.

Through the actions of the Mayor’s Task Force on Opioid Prevention, the City has been working for the last 3 years to raise awareness of substance use conditions; promote health and recovery by reducing stigma and discrimination; and build or improve the environmental factors that support recovery. Several grants have also been received by both the City and the Health District to conduct this work.

In 2019, the Connecticut Association of Prevention Professionals (CAPP) presented Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu with the Government Sector All Star Award. CAPP is a statewide network of prevention advocates that identifies and spreads awareness of behavioral health trends and provides resources across the state. The Mayor and City were recognized for actions making prevention a priority in the City of Bristol. The nomination cited her efforts launching the Mayor's Opioid Task Force and engaging key stakeholders from the community to become part of the process. With input from community partners, two brochures were created; one specifically for community education and one specifically for use by first responders. Also noted were her efforts in having Bristol designated as a "Recovery Friendly Community" as well as the collaboration among health care providers and the Bristol Police Department to create the City of Bristol Recovery Alliance Program (COBRA) in conjunction with Bristol Health.

"This COBRA initiative enables Bristol Police to have discretion when dealing with someone when drugs or alcohol are involved. Police may offer the choice of arrest or to go immediately to Bristol E.R. to begin treatment. COBRA allows for all sectors of the community to work together from Police, EMT, Bristol Hospital, the Bristol/Burlington Health District and Wheeler Clinic," stated Police Chief Brian Gould.

Last year, the Task Force won a Silver Telly Award for its ad campaign featuring vignettes that tell the story of some of the Bristol families affected by substance misuse.

The Youth & Community Services Department also sponsors the BEST (Bristol Eliminating Substance use Together) group which is a peer group of young people encouraging other young people to avoid using drugs, vaping, and other substance abuse issues. A survey taken by the BEST Coalition recently showed that when looking at State and National youth substance use rates, Bristol is significantly lower around alcohol, cigarettes, and RX drug use. However, Bristol youth use of marijuana is similar to the national use rate. "10% of Bristol Youth reported using marijuana within the last 30 days. That number increased to 22% one year later," stated Youth Services Supervisor Stephen Bynum. "Also, 49% of high school students report that marijuana is easy to access. Among the positive, protective factors are that 82% of youth report feeling comfortable asking for help from their parent or guardian and 66% report that their parents talk to them about substance abuse."

"There are a lot of benefits to being a recovery friendly community and addressing the opioid crisis head on," said Councilwoman Mary Fortier, who serves as Council liaison to the Mayor's Opioid Task Force. "Chief among them are reduced substance abuse, fewer overdoses, job stability, and less strain on public resources and law enforcement."

Those interested in learning more about the City's efforts should visit the Opioid Task Force page on the <https://www.bristolct.gov/929/Opioid-Task-Force> website or call the Mayor's Office at 860-584-6250.

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